

# Beyond Lonergan's Method: A Response to William Mathews

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As I wrote in my review of the book (*New Blackfriars*, July 1975), all but one or two of the thirteen symposiasts in *Looking at Lonergan's Method* initiate what seem like quite damaging lines of criticism, and in the space of an article Bill Mathews could no more refute them all (*New Blackfriars*, January 1976) than I could fairly present them all—and, like me, he has incorporated theological reflections of his own, which makes the debate so multilateral that it threatens to exasperate readers without access to the symposium or perhaps even to Lonergan's own books. It seems to me, then, that extended argument about the soundness or otherwise of this phalanx of objections to Lonergan, and about the wisdom of my general endorsement of these objections, with all the grit of detailed claim and contradiction and the paraphernalia of criss-crossing page references and citations, would weary all but a tiny minority of our readers. These I am content to leave to judge for themselves between my reception of the symposium's objections to Lonergan and the totally different assessment proposed by Bill Mathews (and by Hugo Meynell, forthcoming in *The Month*). For the rest, as regards readers without access to Lonergan's books, I must of course emphasise—and after Bill Mathews's article they will surely realise—that it would be unfair for them to take either the symposium itself or my review of it as the last word on Lonergan, enabling them in good conscience to defer for good the labour of reading Lonergan's *Method* and allied works.

What I want to attempt now—because it forced itself on me as I read what Bill Mathews had to say—is to bring out the difference in expectations and presuppositions which (I suspect) leads him and me to read Lonergan so differently. Since it is a difference in perspective that (I believe) divides theologians today, and not only theologians, the issue has the wider implications with which the majority of our readers may be assumed to have some acquaintance and concern. *It is the question of the preconditions of any future theology*. As both John Coulson and Elizabeth Maclaren point out, in the symposium, one must grasp Lonergan's *Method* in the unity of its vision before one can adequately criticise it. Whether consciously or not, the symposiasts seem to me to be trying, in the detail of their essays, to locate and articulate their sense of unease at the viability of Lonergan's project *as a whole*. If their objections at given points can be refuted as 'mis-understandings' it seems to me that they will just move over to focus

their general dissatisfaction at some other point. My appreciation of the symposium certainly springs from my finding that others share a fundamental disquiet about Lonergan (whose works, incidentally, I have been reading intermittently since 1958). The kind of defence of Lonergan that Mathews offers helps me to identify this disquiet and to undertake some analysis of it.

My thesis is that Lonergan's *Method* is disappointing because it does not embody or even anticipate the radical break with what there is in our intellectual tradition that works to inhibit and foreclose a revision of Christian theology. One's fundamental dissatisfaction will always be focussed in particular instances, but even an exhaustive list of these would not necessarily establish one's case. Let me advance this thesis by first designating four of these points of detail which one would mention as evincing a disquieting strain in Lonergan's programme: a strain which severely limits how productive his 'method' can be in future theological activity.

To begin with, there is the criticism which John Coulson makes in a footnote to his essay in *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, a criticism which I did not adduce in my review but one which seems to me serious and open to considerable development: that is to say, that Lonergan seems to have a curiously extrinsic and non-participatory conception of poetry, which in turn casts doubt on his notion of symbol, and that becomes serious in any theoretician of language and meaning. Lonergan asserts (*Method*, page 72) that 'literary language tends to float somewhere in between logic and symbol', already an assertion that displays little delicacy or inwardness about literature, but he goes on to say that 'when it is analysed by a logical mind, it is found to be full of what are termed figures of speech'. For more than fifty years now, in a variety of forms, an understanding of literature has been developed in terms of which Lonergan's conception here seems altogether jejune and unsatisfactory. Admittedly he is not the only theologian one could name—and certainly not the only theorist of language—who is given to holding forth about the nature of meaning (as he is doing at this point in *Method*) without any real sense of the creative and heuristic uses of language in literature (on the same page literary language is described as 'the vehicle of a work, a *poiema*, to be learnt by heart or to be written out'). Perhaps this is a lacuna that Bill Mathews would not acknowledge; after all, in listing what there is for our minds to engage with ('the realms of mathematics, science, common sense, and scholarship', 'the worlds of common sense, science, scholarship, and so forth'), he twice passes over explicit reference to literature and art. Maybe John Coulson is being a little cruel in judging that, in writing of 'communications' (*Method*, chapter 14), 'Lonergan rarely rises above what might be called the language of middle-management' (*Looking at Lonergan's Method*, page 189). The quality of Lonergan's prose is sometimes much finer than that (as indeed Coulson himself says); but surely one is right to remain uneasy about a theological methodology grounded on an account of meaning which seems so offhand about, and so notionally engaged with, the

uses of intelligence embodied characteristically in works of literature and art? When one thinks (say) of essays on poetry and symbol by Karl Rahner, or of Dillistone's Bampton Lectures, this blank in Lonergan's apparatus becomes a considerable limitation of his value as a theoretician of meaning. As I say, Lonergan is not the only philosopher of mind whose sensitivity to the full range and power of language remains inadequate—intended and willed perhaps, yet unmistakably notional and extraneous; in fact I want to suggest that this deficiency marks the whole intellectual tradition, and the overcoming of it would be part of the radical revision of the tradition which might inaugurate some future theological methodology. One prerequisite of any future theologising, surely, is a real sense of how meaning is produced in creative literature and embodied there into a complex texture of insight and understanding that illuminates the work of reading the Scriptures in addition to amplifying one's sense of the diversified power of language.

My second instance of disquiet at Lonergan might be tied to that moment in the record of taped discussion in *Philosophy of God, and Theology* (page 42) when he rebuts a questioner who tells him that his remarks about 'primitive languages' at the beginning of the first of these three lectures are simply untenable from the point of view of science. Lonergan replies that his source was Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Unimpressed, the questioner points out that Cassirer was not a scientist and that if Lonergan is going to 'ignore the social sciences' his theorisations become somewhat suspect. Lonergan replies in turn, a little airily it seems to me, that he 'did not notice Cassirer ignoring the anthropologists', and he goes on to say that 'the fundamental issue is to form notions about language so that you will have the tool, the models, when you come to do the empirical side of the study'. It is difficult not to think that Lonergan is sliding out of the argument here, and in effect saying that if your preliminary notions of language are scientifically worthless they would still help when you began research in linguistics. What would be the use of an empirical study based on models that (in this case) existing social anthropology and linguistics would exclude? But my main difficulty here is over Lonergan's reliance on Cassirer. That his work, idealistic in outlook and transcendental in method, thoroughly neo-Kantian in fact, would appeal to Lonergan is not surprising, and his analysis of 'symbolisation', and of man as a symbolising animal, remains influential (though certainly in need of correction: cf. *Sein, Mensch und Symbol*, by Joseph E. Doherty, 1972); but the scholarship with which he illustrates his theory, informed as it was at the time (the final volume appeared originally in 1929), requires considerable modification in the light of advancing research, particularly as regards the study of language. In *Method* itself, as part of the chapter on meaning, Lonergan gives substantially the same account of language and keeps citing Cassirer in support of such very specific assertions as that (for instance) the generic cannot be represented in a primitive language. That particular claim would no longer be endorsed by many linguists.

ticians. It remains part and parcel of a widely disseminated ideology about how mankind has progressed from a prelogical mentality governed solely by organic and economic needs ('primitive peoples') towards a high degree of abstract thought and objective knowledge such as the rationality of Western man represents ('civilisation'). For Lévi-Strauss, in *La pensée sauvage*, this particular chain of concepts (reason, primitiveness, development, abstract thought, etc.) embodies a mystificatory privileging of a certain notion of rationality—of *logos*—which dominates the Western intellectual tradition and in turn makes it repressive. Here again I would suggest that a viable methodology for theological practice must involve breaking the logocentric spell. But the chapter in *Method* on meaning remains in all essentials continuous with Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, that definitive identification of *Geist* with 'the West', of *logos* with 'Europe', from the authority of which we have still not broken altogether free.

Thirdly, Bill Mathews invites me to name any theological problem and see if it cannot be accommodated within Lonergan's schema of eight functional specialties: to see, that is to say, at what stage in 'the process from data to results' (*Method*, page 125) it should be situated—at the stage, then, of (1) research, (2) interpretation, (3) history, (4) dialectic, (5) foundations, (6) doctrines, (7) systematics, or (8) communications. My difficulty is that I cannot see how the solution of any theological problem would be much advanced by its being found a place in this schema. To mention the first two important theological problems that come to mind: the problem of the notion of truth operative in the Catholic doctrine of infallibility, and the problem of what is natural and *contra naturam* in Catholic teaching on human sexuality. How much light would be cast on such problems by situating them somewhere in this eightfold schema? There would surely be little difficulty in finding them a place, but what would be gained thereby? Doesn't the desire to classify sometimes yield elegant but essentially otiose schemas? Isn't this a venture in categorising which clarifies very little? My point is that I don't doubt that theological problems can be fitted into this taxonomy; I just don't see that it achieves all that much. Part of Lonergan's reason for elaborating the schema is his experience of the 'one-sidedness' from which 'theology has suffered gravely from the middle ages to the present day' (*Method*, page 137). What he has in mind is apparently 'the man with the blind-spot' who 'is fond of concluding that his speciality is to be pursued because of its excellence and the other seven are to be derided because by themselves they are insufficient' (*ibid.*). In face of internal rivalries in the kind of omniscient team of highly autonomous specialists that Catholic seminaries once sought to establish no doubt a scheme for the interdependence of specialties would have much pragmatic value. More than that, as John Coulson points out (*Looking at Lonergan's Method*, page 192), the extent to which one's 'specialty', exegesis as it might be, is accorded a regulative priority over each and all of the others is a question that has divided Protes-

tants from Catholics. What is at issue, then, is the difficult problem of the kind of unity which the actual plurality of theological study may eventually disclose or achieve—and the ecclesiological and ecumenical bearings of one's sense of this unity. Isn't this the problem of 'pluralism'? What hierarchy of modes and discourses must one postulate or desiderate, to secure the unity of theology? But here perhaps the facts of cultural and philosophical difference prove so irreducible that the nature of any possible unity becomes a very difficult question.

Fourthly and finally, in this brief parade of instances that focus disquiet about the long-term usefulness of Lonergan's method, there is the difficult question of the nature of philosophical activity anyway. This certainly divides Bill Mathews from me, and appears to divide him also from Patrick McGrath, with whose judgement (in the symposium) Mathews apparently agrees: 'granted that his (Lonergan's) starting-point is not the analysis of concepts of understanding'; the only difference is that Mathews does not regard this as an objection. For him, Lonergan practises an analysis 'of the more basic human performance of understanding itself'. Mathews thinks that, when one asks for analysis of our concepts of understanding and knowing, one wants 'Aristotelian, Medieval, Rationalist, Empiricist, and Idealist theories or concepts of knowledge', such as Lonergan has written and lectured on so copiously. Thus it seems 'preposterous' to claim, as Patrick McGrath does (*Looking at Lonergan's Method*, page 33) that 'Lonergan has failed to engage in even the most elementary conceptual analysis for the central concepts of his philosophy'. But aren't our expectations here very different? Surely there is a great difference between expounding philosophical theories of knowledge (even together with 'a highly sophisticated dialectical technique for choosing between conflicting theories', as Mathews puts it), and practising a linguistic or conceptual analysis such as the example of Wittgenstein has made familiar? For Mathews, the latter activity would be 'to simply study concepts of understanding without relating them to the experience of understanding', which would be to 'build castles in the air'. He wants to see Lonergan's concepts of understanding and knowing firmly grounded on what, referring to *Insight*, he calls 'a highly experimental study of the human performance of understanding and knowing'. That sounds a fair enough description of *Insight* as an enterprise; it is precisely the quasi-scientific resonance of the language ('experimental', 'performance') that rouses one's disquiet. For another way of putting Patrick McGrath's objection to Lonergan would be to say that Lonergan's analysis tends to float somewhere in between philosophy and psychology. To paraphrase Wittgenstein: perhaps it is that the existence of experimental methods in psychology leads us to think that we have the means of solving the problems about knowledge which trouble us philosophically, whereas in fact the problems and the methods pass each other by. In preferring experimental study of performance to conceptual analysis it seems to me that Mathews is subordinating the grammar of concepts to the study of what there is in nature that gives rise to the grammar. Fair enough; but are we still

doing philosophy? One of the effects of reading Wittgenstein is surely to make one acutely aware of the pervasiveness of scientific modes of discourse and standards of verification in areas in which they are not appropriate. The recent book by David Pears perhaps makes the point (*Wittgenstein*, page 183): 'All his philosophy expresses his strong feeling that the great danger to which modern thought is exposed is domination by science, and the consequent distortion of the mind's view of itself'. The advantage of starting from analysis of concepts as they are used in 'ordinary language', rather than from the history of philosophical theories or from experimental data, or from a mixture of the two, is that problems about mind and reality can best be treated by inserting them in the context of real life. As Wittgenstein once noted, in the unlikely setting of a set of reflections on Cantor's leap into transfinity (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, page 57): 'The malaise of an epoch is cured by a change in people's mode of life, and the malaise of philosophical problems could be cured only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not by a therapy invented by any individual'. What else can that mean but that the kind of issues that arise in philosophy are not solved by the intervention of a man of genius but by a change in the social order? The remark comes in a manuscript dating between April 1938 and January 1939, thus still in the period during which Wittgenstein contemplated emigrating to Soviet Russia. How does such a remark differ from what Marx and Engels wrote in 1845, in *The German Ideology*? Their approach to history, they write, enables them 'to explain the formation of ideas in terms of material practice, and thus to conclude that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be analysed and dissolved by mental criticism (*geistige Kritik*), but only by the practical overturning of the actual social relationships from which these idealist shifts and dodges (*diese idealistischen Flausen*) have emerged' (page 50).

Let me recapitulate. My purpose here is to suggest that what divides readers of Lonergan is an antecedent difference of perspective. Controversy at the level of particular instances could never cease because they are always only attempts to focus a dissatisfaction about the congeniality and the force of his whole operation. His 'method' remains within an intellectual tradition of which (I think) the basic concepts must be radically revised before any viable methodology for future thinking about Christianity becomes conceivable. One might hope, and work, for a conceptual revision which would simultaneously yield at least the openings towards such a methodology. But proposals for theological activity in the future must surely now share already in the surpassal of the intellectual tradition in which Christian theology has principally been conducted. What calls urgently for surpassal in that tradition would be, for instance, to take my four examples in sequence, that (1) it propagates a conception of language which plays down imaginative and creative uses; (2) it privileges a notion of rationality which is finally elitist and ethnocentric; (3) it seeks determinedly to promote unity and homogeneity at the expense of difference and



plurality; and (4) it remains inveterately idealist and metaphysical.

It comes unexpectedly pat for my case, then, that Bill Mathews should refer to Husserl and his 'magnificent' book, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. He designates it as the 'challenge' to which Lonergan responds—the challenge, that is, to show that 'the central task of philosophy is to work towards the unification of knowledge'. Now, I have no doubt that the *Crisis* is a work of major importance. At one level it represents another, and his final, attempt to expound 'phenomenology', and thus concludes the series of such attempts inaugurated in the *Ideen* (1913). At another level, as the work of a philosopher in his mid-seventies, and as the testimony of a Jew by then denied the freedom to teach in his own country, the *Crisis* would already have a complex fascination and pathos even if it were not also explicitly an attempt to diagnose 'the radical life-crisis of European humanity' as it appeared to such a man in 1934. If I now admit to serious reservations about Husserl's book, I must not be taken as meaning that it is not worth attention. On the contrary, struggling with it would liberate many a philosophy student from the hidden, coded ideology that dictates and pervades so much philosophy.

The great problem is about the way Husserl places philosophy at the head of European culture: 'The true struggles of our time', he writes (*Crisis*, page 15), 'the only ones which are significant, are struggles between humanity which has already collapsed and humanity which still has roots but is struggling to keep them or find new ones'—on its own an irreproachable statement. But the next sentence reads: 'The genuine spiritual struggles of European humanity as such take the form of struggles between the *philosophies*'—my italics. And then, in a fashion strangely reminiscent of Heidegger (for all the gulf that existed between the two of them by this date), in his exactly contemporary lecture course (1935) which eventually appeared as *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Husserl goes on to speak as if, like Hegel, he thought that Reason had been uniquely revealed in European history—as if *logos* in the guise of *Geist* belonged essentially to 'European humanity'. As he says, 'to bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities is the only way to decide whether the *telos* which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy . . . is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilisations and histories, or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its entelechy'. In the precursory 'Vienna Lecture' (*Crisis*, Appendix I), Husserl begins by saying that he will 'venture the attempt to find new interest in the frequently treated theme of the European crisis by developing the philosophical-historical idea (or teleological sense) of European humanity'. In face of what was already happening around him in central Europe in 1935 he goes on to discuss this 'remarkable teleology, inborn as it were, only in our Europe'.

When Husserl speaks of Europe, however, what he means is this

(page 273): 'In the spiritual sense the English (*sic!*) Dominions, the United States, etc. (*sic!*), clearly belong to Europe, whereas the Eskimos or Indians presented as curiosities at fairs, or the Gypsies, who constantly wander about Europe, do not'. There is a fairly complex pain in reading *that*, isn't there? And so, after a decisive eschewal of Democritus and any kind of philosophical materialism ('the greatest spirits have recoiled from this', page 293), Husserl goes on to conclude his lecture with this desperately exuberant and disingenuous cadence: 'out of the destructive blaze of lack of faith, the smouldering fire of despair over the West's mission for humanity, the ashes of great weariness, will rise up the phoenix of a new life-inwardness and spiritualisation as the pledge of a great and distant future for man: for the spirit alone is immortal' (page 299).

I would certainly not be asking for any kind of pan-religious, syncretistic *philosophia perennis* if I were now to declare my belief that there can be no way forward in Christian theology which does not break completely with this continually potent myth of 'European humanity' and its inborn privilege of Reason (*Geist, logos*). With 'The dehellenisation of dogma' (in *A Second Collection*, 1974), and all that he has written about 'the end of classicism', Bernard Lonergan is evidently aware of the problem. For myself I cannot see that, in *Method*, he has been able to think his way out of and beyond the closure (which he recognises) of that tradition of thinking. That is not really such a damning criticism of Lonergan, after all; who else has done any better?

The way it seems beyond Lonergan's method to traverse must certainly be broached from within the European tradition. Lonergan sees that very clearly. We can have no truck with Oriental mysticism, glossolalia, schizophrenia, ecoconsciousness, the psychedelic, and all the other varieties of esoteric and exotic material that have been commended to us in recent decades. That can do theologians no better service than the 'enthusiasm' which Hegel pits himself against in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* (1809); it is a refusal to practise conceptual analysis and a mere flight into ecstasy (*nicht der Begriff, sondern die Ekstase*). It leads, as he says, straight into 'the night in which, as we say, all cows are black'. Any diminishment of the exigencies of conceptual thinking means dissolving differences and distinctions. In another famous phrase from the Preface, that would be an approach which 'lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience and the labour of the negative'. For theology now, as for our intellectual tradition as a whole, it is surely this *Arbeit des Negativen* which should be the order of the day. And yet, in Lonergan's *Method*, for all its many excellencies, the impact of the labourers of the negative in our culture remains all but imperceptible. Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, Heidegger—*Method* shows no trace that any of them have been confronted, far less absorbed or surpassed. But what future is there for Christian theology cocooned from that confrontation, and what use is a methodology which has not submitted to it and survived?



Of course it isn't only in the domain of theological studies that the impact of the negative work within the pale of Western consciousness and sensibility has been neutered or displaced. Confining attention only to that, however, don't we have to question the viability of a theology and a methodology that have never come to grips with the set of problems that Martin Heidegger has been raising, with increasing pertinence, for the past fifty years? Writing in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) he said something which I suppose most systematic theologians would now endorse: referring to the crisis (*Grundlagenkrisis*) in mathematics, physics, biology, and history, he goes on to note an analogous phenomenon in Christian theology: 'Theology is seeking a more primordial interpretation of man's being towards God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it. It is slowly beginning to understand once more Luther's insight that the foundation on which its system of dogma rests did not arise from an inquiry in which faith was primary, and its concepts (*Begrifflichkeit*) are not only inadequate for the problematic of theology but actually conceal and distort it'. This formulation plainly belongs to the history of the de-hellenisation of Christian faith which dates at least from Harnack and in which Lonergan has an important place. In the years between, however, for all that many theologians (though surely a minority) have accepted the programme, how much detailed work has actually been done on disentangling specific Christian beliefs from allegedly inappropriate and misleading concepts? The exchange between Christianity and the philosophical tradition has been subjected to far more critique by philosophers determined to expunge the last trace of 'God' from philosophy. The task is much more difficult than some are inclined to imagine. In a lecture first given in 1957 Heidegger drew attention to what he labelled the 'onto-theo-logical structure' of the styles of philosophy generally practised in the West. By this he meant to suggest that, even in 'logical positivism', where the atheism would be explicit, a way of thinking with its axis in 'logic'—and thus in a certain conception of *logos*—could not easily break with the habit of associating *logos* with *theos* and with *on*: 'mind' and 'deity' and 'reality' (if those translations will do, which really they won't) belong to the same generation of concepts, and it is a hazardous enterprise to extricate them from one another. Heidegger relates any attempt to find a principle of unity or an ultimate to the history of the metaphysical concept of deity from Plato to Nietzsche. His own concern is certainly to prevent Christians from going in for theodicy. The name for the deity in traditional theology (so he says) is First Cause: 'To this deity mankind can neither pray nor offer sacrifice. Before the *causa sui* mankind cannot kneel in awe, nor can we sing or dance before that god' (*Identity and Difference*, page 70). A way of thinking which rejected *that* 'God', so Heidegger suggests, might be much freer for the advent of 'the divine God' than the maintenance men of onto-theo-logic would care to admit. On the whole, however, so he concludes: 'One would prefer to remain silent today, in the domain of thought about God, at any rate if one has any experience of the-

ology, Christian or “natural”, drawn from a highly developed stage of theology’ (*ibid.*, page 51). This is not because of ‘atheism’, he goes on to say; it is simply that we have reached the stage at which we realise how dominated and regulated our Western way of thinking is by a context and a texture of presuppositions we have not yet laid bare and settled accounts with.

The question about what makes us think as we do, as Heidegger poses it, very abstractly, becomes, in some who have learned from him, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and others, a multiple question about the limits and horizons of ‘Western thought’. The desire in Heidegger to free people from the urge to find an ultimate principle upon which to found everything (‘God’ as it might be) disseminates into a series of attempts to suss out all nostalgia for a fixed point of reference. Curiously enough, the desire to release people from seeking rational foundations for religious belief is equally marked in Heidegger’s exact contemporary, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Perhaps the attraction for them both that the writings of Augustine and Kierkegaard once had explains this shared distaste for attempts to justify belief. They were also both to give up doing philosophy of the conventional kind, and hoped for students who would follow their example. Nearly all that Heidegger has published since he abandoned *Sein und Zeit* should be regarded as an unfinished, and perhaps unfinishable, set of attempts to get out of habits of thinking imposed upon us by our tradition. What he produces is thus no longer philosophy; it is rather a para-philosophical effort to bring out something about the character of philosophy from Plato until Husserl. Not much wonder that it seems ‘mystical’, ‘solipsistic’, etc.

But the same questions about grounds and boundaries and the place of the unsaid arise in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, and (as he said himself) the later work must be treated as an argument with the earlier. Unfortunately, the order in which his writings have been published has helped to neutralise the critical element in his thoughts. The *Blue Book* (1958) and *On Certainty* (1969) give a much better demonstration of Wittgenstein’s originality than his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). The situation now is that his ideas are being appropriated to maintain precisely the kind of philosophy they should have brought to an end. Perhaps that was inevitable. In a recent essay, Alice Ambrose, one of the students to whom what came to be known as the ‘Blue Book’ was dictated during 1933-34, observes that ‘in the writings of most people who have been exposed to this outlook, the intellectual breakthrough which it represents has been muted or ignored or even denied outright’ (*Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*, 1972). She speaks of ‘the iconoclastic ideas which came out in lectures, dictation, and discussions during the Olympian years’, and about how ‘revolutionary’ some of his thoughts were, in ‘the departure he made . . . from the centuries-long conception of philosophical investigation’. For the theologian brought up in the Catholic tradition one of the most revolutionary thoughts is related to the question of the ‘essence’ and the ‘ground’ of a thing or a belief. ‘The difficulty’, Wittgenstein

wrote (*On Certainty*, 166), 'is to realise the groundlessness of our believing' (not specifically religious believing, there). The 'essence' of a thing often turns out to be a congeries of relations, and it is only a 'mental cramp' to expect otherwise. It becomes possible to conceive, then, that language is not a homogeneous whole but a chain of separate practices, each displaying its own pattern, and none resting on any independent metaphysical foundation. Our irreducibly different modes of thought require no other 'ground' than their insertion in the texture of life.

Again, perhaps more profoundly: 'It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back' (*ibid.*, 471). The urge always to go further back than the beginning is surely nostalgia for some transcendental origin—for the 'idea' of which the beginning seems only a mask or a copy. Again and again, as Wittgenstein insists, it becomes clear that what he wants us to realise is that the process of giving grounds, justifying, etc., comes to an end—but the end is not that certain principles illuminate us immediately, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; on the contrary, it is our *acting* (*Handeln*), which lies at the 'ground' of the language-game' (*ibid.*, 204). That sounds like 'pragmatism', Wittgenstein admits (*ibid.*, 422); but if it does that is because he is being thwarted by a kind of *Weltanschauung*: he is being forced and manoeuvred, against his own intention, into representing an alternative 'theory', whereas all he wants to do is to bring us to the point at which the philosophy can stop. Certainly he is making a radical break with the central metaphysical tradition from Plato onwards, as represented, for example, in Thomas Aquinas, for whom resort to some kind of 'seeing' of 'first principles' remains essential. In fact, Wittgenstein asks: 'isn't the use of the word "know" as a pre-eminently philosophical word altogether wrong?' (*ibid.*, 415). The very notion of writing *Insight* before *Method* is surely thus being brought into question. We are being invited to treat not 'seeing' but 'action' as the 'ground' of our language-game. Our discourse is being related to what we *do* rather than to how things look to us. What counts is the mode of action, *die Handlungsweise*, not 'consciousness'. But this does not mean that Wittgenstein is out to produce some alternative, 'better' *philosophical theory*. The force of that remark about the *Weltanschauung* is surely that his attempt to dispose of one set of philosophical problems will inevitably seem, in a society dominated by *ideas*, only one more solution; whereas when he says that 'the real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to' he should be taken seriously. The alternative to analysing and dissolving one philosophical theory is not necessarily to propose another. The importance of his approach, as he once said (*Investigations*, 118) is that it destroys everything 'interesting', everything 'grand' and 'important'; but what he is destroying is nothing but structures of air, *Luftgebäude*, to lay free the ground of language on which they were erected. But if the 'ground' of language is our 'acting', then this 'destruction' of superstructures of consciousness would leave us with a

mode of life, *eine Lebensweise*—which is what would have to be ‘changed’, because the malaise of an epoch cannot be cured by a great philosopher.

Finally, the critique of philosophy inaugurated by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* must be faced. The ideas of theologians do not spring out of nowhere. They are rooted in the activities and relations obtaining in the believing community to which the theologian belongs, and these activities and relations are in turn interwoven with all the other activities and relations of these men and women. Ideas in theology, like ideas anywhere else, must always be the ideas of men and women involved in a whole round of activities and relations—involved, like it or not, in the entire existing form of society.

Throughout the entire historical period in which Christian theology has been elaborated society has been divided into classes in conflict with one another. None of us can remain unaffected by this conflict. It may be argued that the responsibility of a Christian, and particularly of a theologian, is to neutralise the conflict; my point at the moment is only that at least he must not pretend it isn't there, or that he is unique in being unaffected by it, in his prejudices and interests. But whatever theologians imagine about themselves, there is no theology, no exegesis, which is impartial and neutral, as opposed to partisan and committed, in relation to the deep antagonisms and contradictions in our society. There can be no ‘objective’ theological scholarship; the ‘a-political’ scholar who goes on studying, impervious to the origins of the money which gives him the freedom to research, cannot be regarded as innocent and uncommitted. This is not to say that theology is necessarily ‘the sanctimonious and hypocritical ideology of the bourgeois’, which ‘voices their particular interests as universal interests’ (*G.L.*, page 191). At least, that requires to be demonstrated and documented. Theologies of the past, it may be possible to show, though few serious attempts to do so have in fact ever appeared, may often be the products of an educated minority allied with the ruling elite of the day. It would not be difficult to list the names of theologians who thought and worked against the prevailing system of ideas and ownership. There have always been disaffected, dissident and critical intellectuals in theology, as well as in philosophy and political economy.

Karl Kautsky's *Foundations of Christianity*, completed in 1908, long before the split in the international socialist movement which led to his being discredited as a Marxist thinker, remains to this day the only major analysis of the social and economic matrix of the early Church which tries to relate the theological ideas to the mode of production. Of course, a massive volume of information about every aspect, social, economic and cultural, of the ancient world has been accumulated; what is lacking, only, is adequate interpretation of this material. Some attempts have recently been made. One thinks of Fernando Belo's ‘materialist reading of Mark's gospel’ (Paris, 1974), which is certainly a courageous effort, but finally unsatisfactory, not so much because of the ‘humanism’ to which the argument leads but

rather because of the way in which the text of the gospel is rammed under an a priori schema derived largely from Georges Bataille and Mary Douglas (an eclecticist conjunction of the post-surrealist philosopher of Orgy with the 'bog Catholic' ethnologist of Boundaries which would surely subvert any hermeneutic project). Much more straightforward, and altogether more satisfactory, there is *Marx and the Bible*, by José Miranda (Salamanca, 1971): a deliberate attempt, by a Christian who has opted in practice for the side of the oppressed in his native Mexico, to read the Scriptures against the mainstream, in opposition to the (unconscious) collusion of so much 'impartial' and 'objective' exegesis in the structures of social and economic privilege which subsidise it. The merely moralistic and individualistic outcome at the preaching level of so much serious biblical scholarship proves the unwitting bias.

To repeat, Bernard Lonergan's writings will always be worth the trouble of reading, but the gaps in his programme are such that anyone looking for a theology that will survive the negative labours of such critics as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Marx and Engels, must turn away dissatisfied. It is not that anyone else has done any better than Lonergan, so far. An enormous amount of hard work is all that faces a student of theology at the present time. The lacunae that I find in Lonergan's *Method* are only examples, and symptomatic; and even if we had begun to recognise (with Heidegger) the onto-theo-logical structure of Western consciousness, and to explore (with Wittgenstein) the possibility of dissolving the problematic shifts and dodges of philosophy by recourse to what people actually *do*, and to expose (with Marx and Engels) the power of unconscious class-antagonism in our thinking and research, we should only be at the beginning of a way in Christian theology, access to which lies beyond Lonergan's, or anybody else's 'method'.